United Nations A/56/448/Add.2

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 October 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Agenda item 38
Assistance in mine action

Mine action and effective coordination: the United Nations policy

Sectoral policy: information management for mine action*

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum 2

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–4	2
II.	Objectives	5	2
III.	Guiding principles	6–21	2
	A. General	6–9	2
	B. Information collection and maintenance	10–14	3
	C. Information analysis	15–17	3
	D. Information dissemination and exchange	18–21	4
IV.	Responsibilities and coordination mechanisms for information management	22–35	4
	A. Role and responsibilities of United Nations partners	22–31	4
	B. Contributions of like-minded partners	32–34	5
	C. Coordination mechanisms	35	6
V.	Conclusion	36	6
Annex			
	Glossary of commonly used terms		7

* This sectoral policy was endorsed on 26 September 2001 by the Inter-agency Coordination Group on Mine Action during a meeting chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

01-58339 (E) 021101

I. Introduction

1. There is growing awareness within the international community that what has come to be known as the "global landmine crisis" has far-reaching consequences and requires a multifaceted and integrated response. There is also recognition that the United Nations has a key role to play in articulating this response and in providing the necessary support and coordination mechanisms. This role has been reaffirmed by the General Assembly in successive resolutions on assistance in mine action, as well as in the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects[1] and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.[2]

2. The role of the United Nations as a central repository of information for mine action is particularly critical. In its latest resolution on assistance in mine action (resolution 55/120 of 6 December 2001), the General Assembly emphasized the importance of developing a comprehensive information management system for mine action, under the overall coordination of the Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat and with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, in order to facilitate the setting of priorities and the coordination of field activities. The General Assembly also urged Member States and regional, governmental and non-governmental organizations and foundations to continue to extend full assistance and cooperation to the Secretary-General and, in particular, to provide him with information and data, as well as other appropriate resources that could be useful in strengthening the coordination role of the United Nations in mine action.

3. In addition, both article 11-2 of the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and article 6-6 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction call upon States to provide information to the database on mine clearance established within the United Nations system, especially information concerning various means and technologies of mine clearance, and lists of experts, expert agencies or national points of contact on mine clearance.

4. Building upon recent developments, experiences and lessons learned, the present paper was developed to define the key principles on which United Nations mine-action information management is based and to clarify roles and responsibilities within the United Nations system in this regard. It is intended as a sectoral policy, further elaborating the United Nations mine-action policy document submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session (A/53/496, annex II).

II. Objectives

5. Recognizing that effective information management underpins the success of all aspects of United Nations mine-action programming and management, the objectives of this policy are threefold and complementary:

(a) To foster the ability of the United Nations system, mine-affected countries and the wider international community to maximize the use of information for mine action and other humanitarian and development activities;

(b) To support decision-making and prioritization for both global oversight and field-level mine-action activities;

(c) To strengthen the credibility of the United Nations in terms of transparency, accountability and effectiveness.

III. Guiding principles

A. General

6. Information management refers to the technical resources and skills, as well as procedural and organizational mechanisms, necessary to effectively collect and use information in support of organizational and programmatic objectives, including prioritization and decision-making.

7. Mine action information management refers to the management of information in support of all those

activities which are integral to effective mine action,[3] including:

(a) Mine awareness and risk reduction education;

(b) Minefield survey, mapping, marking and clearance;

(c) Victim assistance, including rehabilitation and reintegration;

(d) Stockpile destruction;

(e) Advocacy and treaty implementation;

(f) Other enabling activities, such as resource mobilization, management and reporting, capacity-building, planning and operational management, training and quality management.

8. Information management is neither an end in itself nor a stand-alone activity. The aim of mine-action information management is to support the mine-action community's decision-making, reporting and public information requirements, while recognizing that these requirements may be different at the field level and at the global and headquarters level. Information management should allow the mine-action community more effectively to:

(a) Define and analyse the landmine problem;

(b) Develop and manage appropriate mine-action programmes;

(c) Assess and measure the progress made;

(d) Mobilize, allocate and monitor resources.

9. Effective information management systems require reliable geospatial data (paper maps and digital data). Therefore, the development of mine-action programmes and information management systems should take into account from the outset the availability, quality, extent, format and acquisition costs of the geospatial data required.

B. Information collection and maintenance

10. Data-collection activities need to be closely coordinated in order to avoid duplication of efforts, and should incorporate proper quality control mechanisms. Data collection and quality control should be conducted in accordance with existing international standards.

11. At the field level, national and local mine-action programmes and mine-action coordination centres, where they exist, are responsible for coordinating the collection of all mine-related data. In their normal coordination role, United Nations resident/humanitarian coordinators will ensure that these efforts are integrated with other information management efforts designed to meet humanitarian and development needs.

12. In order to enhance the reliability, compatibility, comparability and exchange of mine-action information, data collection and recording formats should be standardized. The Mine Action Service, in collaboration with relevant partners, will establish formal procedures to develop and maintain information collection and recording formats and survey standards. Standards and procedures will, wherever possible, follow those already established by relevant groups, such as the Geographic Information Support Team and the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group.

13. The way information is collected and information management systems are structured should be properly documented. The maintenance of metadata, or information about information, should be an integral part of information management, both in the field and at headquarters.

14. The data contained in information management systems represents a significant investment of resources, far surpassing the cost and value of the basic hardware and software. Priority attention should therefore be given to the development of proper information security procedures and tools to safeguard the integrity of the data holdings.

C. Information analysis

15. Information collection and analysis should address the socio-economic factors and criteria required for improved decision-making, including prioritization, of mine-action activities, and support national humanitarian and socio-economic objectives. In addition, information management will provide a common basis for inputs, processing and outputs for all the components of an integrated mine-action programme.

16. The United Nations will develop a knowledge base of guidelines and best practices for country mine-action programme and information managers on the utilization of survey collected data in support of management decision-making.

17. Effective use of information management tools requires training in the requisite skills. Such skills include advanced problem solving and analysis. The United Nations will identify training needs as part of the set-up of a programme and as a recurring capacity-building requirement.

D. Information dissemination and exchange

18. Local and national authorities are the primary owners of mine-action data and information concerning their country. Such information must therefore be properly handled and attributed when used by the United Nations. While certain information may carry specific sensitivities precluding open access, reasons for restricting access to all or portions of datasets should be properly documented.

19. The United Nations supports transparent information exchange for mine action. In principle, all mine action-related information collected by, shared with or made available to the United Nations will be considered public information and dealt with as such. Requests for treating information confidentially must be raised with the United Nations before any such information is provided to the Organization.

20. Information-sharing procedures and mechanisms should be defined and developed based on the users' needs. The detailed information used at the field level is usually not required at the global level. Therefore, mine-related information coming from the field should normally be aggregated and sent to headquarters at one level below the national level.

21. In order to facilitate general information dissemination, as well as the expansion of a mine-action knowledge base, the United Nations supports the maximum use of Internet-based electronic dissemination of information.

IV. Responsibilities and coordination mechanisms for information management

A. Role and responsibilities of United Nations partners

Mine Action Service

22. The Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is the focal point within the United Nations system for all mine-related activities. In this capacity, it has overall responsibility for coordinating the collection, analysis and dissemination of landmine-related information, and for the development of mine-action information management systems. It has entered into a collaborative agreement with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining to support this responsibility. The other partners within the United Nations family are committed to share all relevant information with the Service. The Mine Action Service is also responsible for the development of appropriate standards for mine-action information and information management systems.

Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA)

23. The Department for Disarmament Affairs is the repository of all treaty-related information, in particular, information submitted under article 7 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and under Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

24. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is responsible for sharing all relevant information with the Mine Action Service and other partners regarding the humanitarian implications of landmines. It will work to ensure that appropriate information-sharing arrangements are in place and the integration of mine action into overall humanitarian relief planning.

United Nations Children's Fund

25. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), working in collaboration with the Mine Action Service, is the lead United Nations agency for mine-awareness education. In this capacity, it will support the development of policies and standards for mine-action information and information systems insofar as they relate to mine-awareness education requirements.

United Nations Development Programme

26. Recognizing that the Government of an affected country should assume overall responsibility for a national mine-action programme, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will, when required, and in consultation with relevant partners, assist Governments in creating sustainable national capacities for information management, as an integral part of an overall mine-action programme.

World Health Organization

27. Within the framework of its mandate, and in cooperation with the Mine Action Service, the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) will support the development of policies and standards for mine-action information and information systems insofar as they relate to victim assistance. WHO will ensure that information collection and management activities that concern victims are designed and executed with the principle of non-discrimination in mind, so that all victims of trauma are equally served by the development of victim information systems.

World Food Programme

28. As the food aid arm of the United Nations, the World Food Programme (WFP) uses its food to meet emergency needs, support economic and social development and provide the logistics support necessary to deliver food. Consistent with its mandate, and in support of the development of rapid mine-action responses in emergency situations, WFP will, in coordination with the Mine Action Service and other partners, contribute to the early collection, analysis and dissemination of mine-related information. The Programme will help to determine emergency and humanitarian mine-clearance needs as they relate to the transport, storage and distribution of food.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

29. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for ensuring that the needs of refugees and other populations of concern to UNHCR are met. Building on its internal management mechanism for emergency preparedness and response in particular, UNHCR will, in coordination with the Mine Action Service and other partners, contribute to the collection and analysis of appropriate information to support the development of mine-action responses when and where required.

United Nations Office for Project Services

30. The United Nations Office for Project Services is a principal service provider within the United Nations system for integrated mine-action and capacity-building programmes. Implementing mine-action programmes as appropriate in collaboration with concerned partners (the Mine Action Service, UNDP and others), it will ensure that due consideration is given to the provision of adequate, timely and appropriate support to all mine-action information management efforts to include equipment, hardware, software, staff/counterpart training and management training.

Other United Nations agencies and departments

31. The contributions of other United Nations agencies and departments, in particular, those which are part of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, are essential for effective mine-action information management. The needs of these agencies and departments will be fully incorporated into the planning of mine-action information initiatives. They will provide full information in support of these initiatives.

B. Contributions of like-minded partners

32. The United Nations welcomes and acknowledges all contributions to mine-action information management made by like-minded partners from Governments, the private sector, research institutions and civil society. A guiding principle is to avoid duplication and maximize mutual benefits from the use of, inter alia, existing databases and software solutions.

Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

33. The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining is a principal executing partner of the Mine Action Service. In order to meet some of the information requirements of the United Nations, it has agreed with the Service to develop an Information Management System for Mine Action. Under the arrangement, the Mine Action Service is responsible for providing guidance to the Centre for the definition of the overall policy, scope, content, functionality and deployment requirements of the System. The Centre is responsible for development, implementation and training in the field, technical support and project management.

International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations

34. The International Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian non-governmental organizations are important contributors to mine action. They are an invaluable source of information on landmine-related issues and contribute actively to the development of information management systems for mine action.

C. Coordination mechanisms

35. A Mine Action Information Working Group, established and chaired by the Mine Action Service under the auspices of the Inter-agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, supports the overall coordination of United Nations mine-action information issues and activities. It reviews, validates and prioritizes information and information system needs, and provides guidance and support to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in this regard.

V. Conclusion

36. The present document aims to provide the overall policy framework within which the information required for mine-action activities can be managed most effectively and in a coordinated manner. It will be complemented by more detailed technical guidelines and standards to support the development of data-collection procedures and information management systems.

Notes

[1] "Amended Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-traps and Other Devices", adopted in Geneva on 3 May 1996.

[2] The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was opened for signature in Ottawa on December 3, 1997.

[3] Therefore, it does not simply refer to the Information Management System for Mine Action, which the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining is developing for the United Nations in order to meet some of its mine-action information requirements.

Annex

Glossary of commonly used terms

Geographic information system (GIS). GIS is a powerful software technology that allows an unlimited amount of information to be linked to a geographic location. Coupled with a digital map, GIS allows a user to graphically view multiple layers of data based on their geographic distribution and association. GIS incorporates powerful tools to analyse the relationships among various layers of information.

Georeferencing. Georeferencing refers to a process whereby geographic coordinates or other indirect referencing codes are added to tabular data in order to allow simple comparison, compilation and analysis of disparate datasets based on common locations.

Mine Action. Mine action refers to all those activities that aim to address the problems faced by civilians as a result of landmine contamination. United Nations mine action encompasses five complementary core components: (a) Mine-awareness and risk-reduction education; (b) minefield survey, mapping, marking, and clearance; (c) victim assistance, including rehabilitation and reintegration; (d) advocacy to stigmatize the use of landmines and support a total ban on anti-personnel landmines; and (e) stockpile destruction. In support of these core components, other activities will be key to the success of mine action and mine-action programmes, such as: resource mobilization; national and local capacity-building and requisite institutional support; information management; training of personnel; and quality management.

Raster data. Raster data use an imaginary grid of cells to represent the landscape. Point features are stored as individual column and row entries in a grid; lines are identified as a set of connected cells; and areas are distinguished as all of the cells comprising a feature.

Relational Database Management System (RDMS). As opposed to a single table with numerous fields for each record entered, a RDMS uses identification codes to link multiple tables of data. The codes used establish the relationship between data tables. RDMS is very effective in managing large amounts of data and permitting detailed queries to determine the relationship among data compiled against different records.

Vector data. Vector data use sets of X,Y coordinates to locate three basic types of landscape features: point, lines and areas. Points (towns, incident locations, etc.) are represented by a single pair of X,Y coordinates. Lines (roads, rivers, etc.) are represented by a series of X,Y coordinate points connected in order. Areas or polygons (lakes, administrative boundaries, urbanized areas, etc.) are represented by a set of X,Y coordinates closing on itself and implying its interior.